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23 February 1950

MEMORANDUM FOR: DIRECTIVE  
MANAGEMENT OFFICER  
COAPS

FROM: Assistant Director, OGD

SUBJECT: Management Survey of Biographic Register

1. Transmitted herewith is a Letter on the Biographic Register which, unluckily, exists in only one copy. I shall have to ask that the addressee route it from one to the next. The Dossier contains comments by the Chief of BR on Management's detailed recommendations, as well as a number of exhibits showing actual examples of the work being done by BR. I have not time to write about all the minutiae myself, but will deal in this paper with the points which seem to me most important. I have entered symbols and brief notes on the face of Management's paper.

On the next to last page of BR's comments I have indicated that we will dig deeper before deciding that no further simplification is possible in two of BR's machine operations. There is always danger, in an office equipped with IBM machines, that machine enthusiasts will be tempted to use the equipment for purposes which are not wholly essential. Management has focussed light on two operations which I shall wish to explore in person.

2. Clarification of mission. I am in full agreement with Management's apparent intent on this score, and also with   letter which Management shows as Tab 1. The letter is a very good one. If we could get interdepartmental agreement on these lines we would really put CIA into a position favorable for full achievement of the biographic mission in foreign intelligence. But BR is correct in saying that the departments are too short-handed to prepare large quantities of abstracts for their own or CIA's use, and I fear that COAPS will find itself up against a glass wall if it tries to sell the scheme to the agencies.

Though I hate to let things go by default, I believe it would not be good tactics for the Agency to put hot and heavy pressure on this proposal. Important though it is, biographic intelligence is only one aspect of the broad picture; and we have other burning issues which are vital to CIA's continued existence before us. Rather than start an all-out offensive on this front I believe we should select concrete objectives

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*John (RC)*  
*Jan '49*  
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- 2 -

within the scope of our present framework, and attack them on a priority basis. I agree with BK that it would be a mistake, however, to set up a rigid and inflexible pattern of limitations based on what today is practicable. We should leave ourselves latitude to select targets of opportunity. We should not turn down requests for any reason except inability to do the work. We should do the best we can with every request which is directed to US - whether or not a directive or functional statement covers it explicitly.

3. "Evaluation." the question as to whether anyone in OGB should be permitted to do any evaluating at all, is a red herring which is forever being dragged across our trail. It appears in various guises throughout management's survey report on the Biographic Register. The argument runs like this: a) Evaluation is part of the intelligence production process, b) There are two Offices charged with producing finished intelligence, c) Therefore no one in OGB should be permitted to evaluate anything.

It is time to take a hard look at this red herring and, if we find it offensive to the general welfare, to bury it.

There is nothing magical about the process of evaluation, and nothing which makes it the sole property of Deep Thinkers turning out finished intelligence on political, economic, scientific, and military matters. I read in a magazine the other day that Robert Schumann was born in 1810 and died in 1856. By a process of evaluation I determined that one or both of these dates was wrong. So I turned to a copy of

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and found that the correct dates were 1810 and 1856. This is precisely the kind of evaluation which BK must perform every time it writes, or proofreads, a biographic report; and it is able to do it much better and more efficiently than the Deep Thinkers because it is intimately familiar with a host of biographic reference tools and has them at its elbow. These fat volumes are organized in different ways, they employ different abbreviations and styles, and they even spell and arrange foreign names according to different systems. We do not want to put a complete set of these references in every office, and we would be unwise to put them all in the Library and require all analysts in OGB and OBI to study them and learn their quirks. See Exhibit E in the Register.

Now evaluation in biographic intelligence does, and very properly should, go a good deal further than this. If my magazine had gone on to say that Schumann owed his great reputation to his views on dialectical materialism I should have evaluated this as a highly suspect statement. Perhaps, if I were writing a biographic report on Schumann, I'd have included this statement - but I'd have been very careful to quote the source, and also to make it clear that a great many authorities had come to a different conclusion. This kind of evaluation must also be done by the Register, and it must be careful to quote sources for every statement which it makes.

There is a final type of evaluation which lies outside the BK bailiwick. It should not, for example, make such a statement as "In the opinion of CIA, Schumann's greatest contribution to musical history

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- 1 -

let the curiosity he gave to the all-but-forgotten music of Johann Sebastian Bach." BR might quote such a statement as this, giving its source, but it should leave it to CIA's musicologists to decide whether or not the Agency should publish it as its own final estimate.

Articles A, C, and D in the Register show actual reports turned out by BR on scientists, [ ] political figures, and two organizations in [ ]. Several comments from the requestors for whom the work was done are included. It will be noted that the reports do not give final evaluations of the personalities concerned, but that they have pulled together a great amount of material on each, have quoted sources for each statement of fact, and have arranged the whole in readily readable and intelligible form. This, I believe, is precisely what the Register should do; and we have reason to believe that most of our customers are satisfied with the results.

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[ ] of RDB, in the letter cited by Management, says: "The directive covers only biographical 'data'. The Departmental intelligence agencies evaluate much of this data to produce biographical intelligence. It is highly important that both the data and the intelligence be incorporated in CIA's central register."

Last week's finished intelligence is today's information, to be reassessed in the light of other information received during the week if we must write a report today. It is BR's job to pull the bits and scraps together, screening out obvious errors, citing sources for contradictory statements, and putting the whole in such shape that the analysts can dig into it without waste of time and effort.

4. Management's General Proposal, that BR should write no biographic reports but should merely assemble bits and scraps in dossiers, leaving it to the analysts in OAK or OSI to make sense of them, is entirely impracticable. The information contained in reference volumes could not, without monumental waste of effort, be typed out, clipped, and put in the dossiers. And our customers would not be happy if, instead of getting reports from BR, they were handed masses of contradictory and repetitive information and told to boil it down themselves. They would promptly call for additional hands to do the job, set up their own files, order reference books, and generally go baring off in different directions.

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